

# ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

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## GERMANY

### Catholics and Protestants United against Youth Dedications

A pastoral letter from the Roman Catholic bishops of East Germany objecting to state support of the Communist-sponsored youth dedication ceremonies has been read in all Catholic churches in East Berlin and the German Democratic Republic. Similar action was taken by the East German Evangelical bishops (see EPS No. 40).

Affirming that state support make the ceremonies obligatory and encroaches on liberty of conscience, the bishops told the congregations that acceptance of the youth dedications was incompatible with confession of the Christian faith. They recalled their previous stand against voluntary participation in the ceremony, issued in October 1955.

The youth dedication issue has been dramatised by an incident in the East German town of Schwerin, where the public prosecutor has placed a clergyman under arrest on a charge of refusing "honourable burial" to the daughter of the president of an collective farm who had participated in the youth dedication ceremony. The prosecutor has opened proceedings against the pastor, Propst Märcker, and denounced his stand as an infringement of the equal rights granted to all citizens under the DDR constitution. Following the incident the vice-president of the Schwerin town council told the Bishop of Mecklenburg, Dr. Niklot Beste, that in future there must be no distinction in providing the use of communal or church cemeteries or funeral chapels. A reply from the church is expected.

Reacting to the arrest of the Schwerin pastor, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Josef Frings, has written to Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin to express "pain and indignation". He says "we feel as though we had all been arrested too, for everyone with church oversight, whether Protestant or Catholic, would have felt obliged to act in the same way in a similar situation."







Visa Refused, Press Attacks Church

East Berlin authorities have refused a visa for Bishop Volkmar Hertrich of Hamburg, who was to have attended the annual Luther Association meeting in Wittenberg, DDR, on October 31. Bishop Hertrich is vice-president of the Association. Following the refusal, the meeting was transferred to Berlin.

An issue of the East German Evangelical News Service failed to appear on October 24, and has been assumed confiscated by the authorities in East Germany.

The wave of attacks on Evangelical and Catholic churches has increased in political parties and newspapers. Accusations levelled at church leaders have become increasingly derogatory in the last few weeks. A publication of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) has described Christianity as "a corrosive poison in a country which has succeeded in establishing Socialism under the leadership of the working class". Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim, of Thuringia, has been accused of "misusing the Bible outrageously and degrading it into a primer of instruction for NATO".

Berlin Church Defends Currency Dealings

Following allegations against two pastors of the church in Magdeburg charging them with illicit currency transactions (see EPS No. 41), the council of the Church of Berlin-Brandenburg has issued a statement, which says: "Last year in West Berlin one-and-a-half million East German marks were received as contributions to church taxes and collections. In May 1956 a first application was made, and then repeated, for transference of these East German marks to East Berlin. A permit could not be obtained. On October 16, 1957, a fresh application was made for transfer of this money. The 400,000 East marks referred to come from this source.

"The responsible leaders of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg have asked for further inquiries to be made into the matter. According to investigations so far made, the sums in question were all received in a legal way. The Evangelical Bishop of Berlin has nothing whatsoever to do with the transaction."

E.P.S., Geneva


Refugees Arrive from Hong Kong

(Geneva) - Sixty-one White Russian aged and sick "hard core" refugees from China landed in Geneva on Sunday, November 4, on their way to hospitals and homes for the aged in Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, France and Ireland. They were met by Dr. Edgar Chandler, the World Council of Churches' Director of Service to Refugees.

Their arrival marked the end of years of work on behalf of thirty-five of them by the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees of the World Council of Churches. Many of the thirty-five leaving Hong Kong under WCC sponsorship had applied for emigration as long ago as 1952. Of the World Council sponsored cases, sixteen will remain in Switzerland, ten go to Belgium, six to Ireland, two to Sweden and one to France.

E.P.S., Geneva





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COLOMBIAEvangelicals Ask Government to Assure Religious Freedom

(Bogota) - The Evangelical Confederation of Colombia has asked the government to adopt a series of measures which it said would protect the rights of Protestants in this country and "correct the abuses of the past... in this new era of legality and right". The request was made in a letter sent to the military junta government last July and just made public two weeks ago.

The confederation, made up of fourteen groups, most of them of United States origin, said that as an immediate result of the letter the Interior Minister has taken steps aimed at eventually reopening closed Protestant schools at places "where public order will not be imperilled by such action". They said the church at Barrancabermeja, which ministers to the largest Protestant congregation in Colombia, was reopened a month ago. However, two weeks later, the church was again closed. The congregation has taken legal steps to have it reopened, so far without result.

The confederation said in its letter that its members believed "that they will obtain guarantees from authorities and the respect of the Colombian people to worship God and Christ according to their conscience" and asked for a public declaration on religious freedom in Colombia. The government was also asked to direct subordinate officials instructing them to grant guarantees to Protestants.

E.P.S., Geneva

SOUTH AFRICAMissionary Council Set Up for Bantu Areas

A Missionary Council for the Bantu (non-white) trust areas in the Transvaal has been formed by the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) to study missionary requirements. At its first meeting the council recommended appointing ten additional white missionaries and five non-white ministers and establishing four new mission hospitals in the trust area. There are 3,400,000 Bantus in the Transvaal, 1,124,000 of them living in the trust areas.

At the same time, the Dutch Reformed Church announced that its first Indian converts were baptised at Boksburg last month. The church recently appointed its first missionary to work among the Indians in the Transvaal.

E.P.S., Geneva

POLANDInter-Church Aid Reaching Pastors, Workers, Churches

(Warsaw) - Renewed ecumenical inter-church aid in Poland is meeting with generally satisfactory results, it was reported at a special session of the Polish Ecumenical Council on October 29-30 in Warsaw. The council convened to meet the Rev. Howard Schomer, World Council of Churches Secretary for Inter-Church Aid in Europe, and Pastor Daniel Cederberg of Staffanstorp, Sweden, who is serving both the Lutheran World Federation and the WCC as a special liaison with the Polish churches.

It was reported that every pastor and every full-time lay church worker is receiving a special emergency grant equal to approximately two months' salary. At the same time, the first new ecumenical gifts for church work, institutional services and building repairs are being received.

After detailed consultations during the council meeting and with denominational leaders, the general framework for a larger programme of assistance in 1958







was worked out. Pastor Cederberg is at present travelling through Poland visiting local churches and projects and helping churches draw up statements concerning their most urgent needs.

During the council sessions, it was reported that the draft constitution and bylaws have been presented to government authorities for recognition. Several of the seven member churches have named their official representatives to the council. The council also noted that it had been granted consultative status with the World Council of Churches as a result of action this summer by the WCC's Central Committee.

Commissions were set up by the Polish Council to deal with inter-church aid, literature and Sunday school and youth work. The Rev. Jan Niewiecerzal of the Reformed Church heads the Inter-Church Aid Commission, the Rev. Otto Krenz of the Evangelical Augsburg Church will direct the Literature and Sunday School Commission and the Rev. Bogdan Tranda of the Reformed Church is head of the Youth Commission.

E.P.S., Geneva

#### SWITZERLAND

#### Paris Mission Hears Reports from Cameroons, Algeria

Reports on current problems in the Cameroons and Algeria marked the General Assembly of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society held recently in Geneva. The meeting was the first to be held in that city for 27 years and was widely regarded as underlining the society's international and ecumenical character.

Reporting on the situation and prospects of the newly autonomous Reformed Church in the Cameroons, Pastor Malo, one of the church's pastors, said: "It is now that the churches have the greatest need of missionaries who stay with them to keep them going, missionaries of the finest calibre, not bosses but workers, who will carry on the struggle. One can feel a rising force in those churches. Something positive has sprung from their independence and the missionary is freed; he is no longer responsible for everything. The whole work is inspired with an atmosphere of confidence and real collaboration."

Pastor Malo described the political climate of the Cameroons as "anti-Protestant". He said the churches were "caught in a tension between Islam and neo-paganism", and that "Western atheism is becoming established in workshops where owners are not Christians". Pastor Malo appealed for men and money to aid in overcrowded hospitals and schools.

In a review of missionary problems in Algeria, Pastor André Chatoney, district president of the French Reformed Church in Algeria, said that in 1954 32 mission stations employed nearly 100 missionaries recruited by the Algerian Missionary Council from a variety of churches and missionary societies. He said there was a growing need for missionaries equipped to carry on a discussion with Muslim intellectuals. An Evangelical Institute for the study of Islam is being planned. The Algerian crisis has forced many mission stations to close, but others are carrying on and need new personnel.

The meetings of the society, which is broadly interdenominational, were attended by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and by Dr. Marcel Pradervand, general secretary of the World Presbyterian Alliance.

E.P.S., Geneva







GERMANYBerlin Kirchentag Builds Inner Life of Church

A "new kind of Kirchentag", this time in the autumn, has been held in Berlin following cancellation of plans to meet in the summer in Thuringia, DDR (see EPS No. 17). The substitute meeting, attended by 3,000 delegates from East and West Germany, concentrated on deepening the inner life of the churches by intensive personal discussion and sharing of experience between the congregations. Those aims were also realised by visiting local congregations in many parts of East and West Berlin.

The Berlin meeting was preceded by heated press attacks in Communist East Germany, accusing the Kirchentag movement of being politically motivated.

The Hamburg evangelical paper "Sonntagsblatt" says that the delegates "did not allow themselves to be intimidated: they came in spite of all the difficulties - and that in itself is significant". When they were together they did not make any demonstration or protests, the report says. They just talked quietly and modestly about the concerns of the Church. "The Kirchentag has sometimes been suspected of living on political enthusiasm and in the hope of German reunification. The autumn meetings in Berlin allayed this suspicion. They showed that the Kirchentag is founded on the voice of Christ."

Kirchentag president Reinold von Thadden described the Berlin meeting as a time for spiritual reflection in the Church. He said it would not have much effect on the world at large but stimulate the whole work of the Church, where there was a great danger of falling into routine.

The same note was struck by Klaus von Bismarck, lay leader from the Ruhr, when he told one of the six closing meetings held in the Sports Palace that the aim was not "a demonstration for German reunification, nor a Christian plan for solving the political problems of today". Bismarck said that "it would ill become Protestants and the Church which sprang from the Reformation to insist from political motives on the continuance of an indivisible German national Church. If we are really ready to repent", he continued, "to accept the destiny of our poor country from God's hand as constituting our task, then we shall remain indivisible as we perform it." Telling the meeting that the repentance and commitment of the Church would be shown in its "understanding shown to the under-privileged and people of other faiths", Bismarck recalled how "the fear and misery of the Third Reich taught us that it is in just such conditions that Christ has sometimes tested us and encountered us in the form of Jews and Marxists."

The five other closing meetings were held in churches in East and West Berlin. Speakers included Dr. Gerhard Brennecke, missionary leader from East Berlin, Pastor Bruno Schottstädt of the evangelical Gossner Mission in Berlin, Dr. Hans-Herman, Kirchentag general secretary, and Pastor Martin Niemöller, who spoke on Christian unity and on missions.

October 27 was celebrated in all German evangelical churches as "Kirchentag Sunday". Pastors preached on the text chosen from the Berlin meeting: "The Lord, He Is God". The services and the Berlin Kirchentag were a culmination to smaller "local Kirchentags" along the same line throughout the summer (see EPS. No. 38).

Next year a similar congress or "small Kirchentag" will be held in Hamburg. The next full scale Kirchentag will be in Munich in 1959. E.P.S., Geneva







In Brief

The new Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev. Joost de Blank, made South African history at his enthronement on October 21 when he repeated a large part of his sermon in Afrikaans. The archbishop said he had no easy solution for the complex problems in South Africa, but told the congregation that he prayed that sacrificial love would find expression in the communities, industries and education in the Union.

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A conference of 55 theological students from the Evangelical Church of Hessen-Nassau, Germany, has urged the Evangelical churches in Germany to take more interest in Asian church unions and apply lessons learned by the younger united churches.

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For the first time on record, a Lutheran pastor from the state of Madhya Pradesh in India will serve within the Lutheran missionary work in Tanganyika, where there are about 60,000 Indians. Of these, one-third, mostly Hindus and Moslems, live in Dar es Salaam, the capital.

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A church calendar has been published by the Lutheran Church of Estonia for the first time since the incorporation of that country in the Soviet Union in 1944. The church, under Archbishop Jaan Kiivit, has about 350,000 members.

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The existence of small continuing groups of Lutherans is reported in the district between the River Neva and Lake Paipus, which at one time belonged to Sweden and is now part of the USSR. Three old pastors are assisted by laymen in giving baptism, communion, marriage and funeral rites. At a Protestant festival in the town of Kelto, baptism and the confirmation of youth took place in the open air in the absence of a building for worship.

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"The Gospel of Christ" is a new four-page monthly published by the United Church of Christ in Japan and designed chiefly for laymen and "seekers". Ten thousand copies of the first issue of the publication were printed.

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A director of religious programmes on television has been appointed by the Finnish Broadcasting System. He is Mr. Osmo Visuri, formerly with the Finnish Missionary Society.

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A new wing of the Lampsa Old People's Home in Athens, Greece, has been opened by His Beatitude the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Theoclitos. The wing, which will accommodate ninety aged Iron Curtain refugees, was made possible by money given through the World Council of Churches and by gifts from private benefactors.

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King Paul and Queen Frederica of Greece visited the aged refugees in St. Pantaleimon's Home in Salonica on October 28. The home is jointly financed by the World Council of Churches and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and houses forty men and women from behind the Iron Curtain.

E.P.S., Geneva



